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Book Reviews

THE LIFE OF CHRIST

New Testament study stands greatly in need today of a sympathetic life of Christ, which will be scientifically up to date. No comprehensive work published in recent years happily combines these two features. Mr. Grist in his *Historic Christ in the Faith of Today*¹ unmistakably presents a more successful attempt than we have yet had to satisfy this need.

Personally, the author's preparation for his task has been decidedly advantageous. An Oxford man, with six years' missionary experience in China, he has for the past ten years been a pastor in the British Wesleyan Church. He brings, therefore, to his present undertaking a scholarly method, a comprehensive perspective, a tolerant attitude, and familiarity with other faiths, as well as a vital religious experience and a close acquaintance with the intellectual conditions and religious aspirations of the Anglo-Saxon of today.

The first chapters, which are largely concerned with methods, leave little to be desired. The author freely admits the subjective element of the Gospels, though maintaining a "primitive deposit of apostolic memories which constituted their central living cell" (p. 13).

There is no exhaustive treatment of the virgin birth. The problem is clearly recognized as immaterial. The author refuses to dogmatize, though one infers the verdict of his own criticism would tend to be negative (p. 36). The baptism is portrayed as messianic and primarily significant to Jesus himself. "The term 'Son' is no metaphor of physical or metaphysical fact, but the moral truth of the perfect manhood of Jesus." "God's perfect idea of manhood was born in him; he realized in himself the divine Sonship of humanity. That is his difference from us; we only partially attain the goal: But of him the Father in Heaven could testify, 'This day have I begotten thee'" (pp. 56, 57). "Man is *capax dei*: the uniqueness of Jesus is that God became human in him; his divinity must be thought of as something of which human nature was capable at its highest." Yet "there is no suggestion in all

¹ *The Historic Christ in the Faith of Today*. By WILLIAM ALEXANDER GRIST. New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1911. Pp. 509. \$2.50.

this that such thoughts dispel the mystery concerning Jesus; the problem of pre-existence and the mode of the kenosis which constituted the initial step in the historic incarnation are left untouched" (pp. 59, 60).

The course of the ministry follows very nearly conventional lines, save that the raising of Lazarus and the associated ministry in Judea of the Fourth Gospel are inserted into the framework of Mark at a point just previous to the feeding of the multitudes.

In the discussion of the miracles, distinctions between natural and supernatural are recognized as "relative to our plane of vision." "Man is imperfectly personal. . . . We are aware of an inward disproportion," hence, if we call our present state *natural*, then the realization of our own ideal would be supernatural. If, then, there appeared in our history a perfect personality, who actualized all human potentialities, and who was in such harmony with the will of God as to be truly the divine Son, it might be expected that much of his activity would appear to us supernatural. . . . But while we recognize the note of transcendence in the person of Jesus, we do not imagine him to have been outside the scope of nature's laws and forces" (p. 113).

Though numerous miracles, such as certain of the healings, the feeding of the multitudes (two are admitted), the walking on the sea, etc., are critically explained in accordance with laws partly understood at present, others, like the raising of Lazarus, are freely admitted to transcend all known analogies. They are, however, accepted as historical in view of the fact that "the fulness and variety of the life of the Son of Man makes even the most stupendous of the gospel miracles appear credible in our eyes" (p. 121). Jesus' own bodily resurrection is cordially acknowledged, not as a reanimation but a transformation into a body "altogether responsive to his spiritual will." "Men have learned too well the limitations of their knowledge to venture any dogmas concerning the nature of matter; we can only surmise that it is the product of spirit, and has been constituted the medium of spiritual operations and of earthly fellowship" (pp. 496 f.).

The book, though sometimes too diffuse and marked by occasional repetitions, is charmingly written in a delightfully fresh and sympathetic style. One feels indeed that the actual application of the author's critical method might at times be more thoroughgoing, e.g., in the treatment of material from the Fourth Gospel; but the philosophical presuppositions, the open-mindedness, the sympathy of treatment, and the moral and spiritual insight with which the book is written are admirable. On the whole, the verdict that it is the best life of Christ of the

popular type which has been published since Edersheim's is probably not an exaggeration, and a large usefulness can be predicted for it.

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In a recent volume, Professor W. B. Hill, of Vassar College, endeavors to give the student who takes up for the first time a study of Jesus' life the preliminary information necessary for an intelligent approach to the subject. To call the book an *Introduction to the Life of Christ*¹ is not quite exact. We might expect, in these days of historical interest, that one would feel the necessity of introducing himself to this subject by way of the history of the times in which Jesus' life was set, but of this there is no word in the present volume. Nor is there any essential place for it in the author's method, since he thinks "the Christ of history is best known through the Christ of personal experience."

What is presented is really an "Introduction" to the writings in which Jesus' name is mentioned. References to him in heathen and Jewish writings, items gleaned from the Apostolic Fathers, data from the apocryphal books and from the New Testament literature outside the Gospels are briefly catalogued. Chief attention is centered upon the four canonical gospels. Their collection into a canon, the manner of ascertaining their original text, the date of their composition, their literary relation to one another, their authors, their characteristics and trustworthiness as sources for the life of Christ are the principal topics discussed.

The writer seems to be quite as much interested in apologetics as in history. He would hardly allow the college student (for whom the book is prepared) to approach Jesus' personality from the standpoint and by the methods employed in the pursuit of other historical problems. He must take a very different attitude here. The Gospels are to be regarded as a unique product canonized by the "Spirit of God working in the churches." The stories about Jesus' miracles and his divine origin as related in the Gospels are never to be questioned. The author would have his readers understand at the beginning that the question of an early or a late date for the Gospels never would have arisen except out of an interest of skeptics to deny that miracles ever happen or to refuse to see anything divine in Jesus. Of those who think

¹ *Introduction to the Life of Christ*. By W. B. HILL. New York: Scribner, 1911. Pp. x+226. \$1.25.